

Testimony in Favor of Raised Bill 136, An Act Concerning New and Revised Academic Programs of Nonprofit Independent Institutions of Higher Education

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Good morning. I am Walter Harrison, President of the University of Hartford, and I am here to testify in favor of Raised Bill 136, An Act Concerning New and Revised Academic Programs of Nonprofit Independent Institutions of Higher Education, and to speak against Connecticut's current practice of requiring some of its independent institutions to obtain state approval before adopting new educational programs or making significant changes in existing programs.

In my view, Connecticut's current requirement is an unnecessary and redundant program that is out of step with the best higher education practices around the country.

Before I explain why I believe that to be the case, I want to say quite clearly that my testimony is not a criticism of the Department of Higher Education or its staff, who I have found to be highly competent, highly knowledgeable professionals. It is absolutely not a criticism of Michael Meotti, the commissioner. I have nothing but the highest regard for Mike. Connecticut is extremely fortunate to have such a dedicated, intelligent public servant. This is simply a case of a subject about which two people can reasonably disagree, although they agree on almost all other issues facing higher education.

When I first came to the University of Hartford in 1998 I was astonished to find that, as a private university, we were required to submit new programs for review and approval to the Department of Higher Education. I had spent the previous nine years as a vice president at the University of Michigan, and—even as a public university—we were not required to seek any state approval for new programs. Nor were the private institutions in the state. I looked into the matter a little, and soon discovered that only eleven of the fifty states require this sort of program approval.

I then discovered—to my enormous surprise—that four private institutions (Yale, Wesleyan, Connecticut College, and my alma mater, Trinity) were exempted from this requirement. Surely, I thought, if this requirement adds value, those four institutions must be suffering while those of us who have this requirement were demonstrably better off. This is, of course, not the case.

It might also be instructive to know what proposed University of Hartford program was being held up by the state's bureaucratic process in 1998—a proposed new major in, of all things, pre-cantorial studies. Because the University of Hartford has a world famous music conservatory and a very well known program in Jewish Studies, we thought it would make sense to allow talented voice majors who were also interested in becoming cantors a chance to supplement their music studies with some religious studies to prepare them for graduate school to become cantors. We were going to flood the market with

maybe one or two people who wanted to become cantors each year, and to do that the state needed to spend six to eight months reviewing the program.

For twelve years I have been quietly trying to call the state's attention to this. Now I have my chance.

In the arcane world of higher education accreditation, the state's process is always the second outside review and more often than not the third outside review—this in addition to the very stringent review process that our own faculties require.

In every case, all not-for-profit colleges and universities are subject to review and accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). In most cases, the professional discipline also has a required accreditation—in every professional discipline from engineering to art, music, and dance this is the case. (Only in some of the liberal arts is this second level not required.) So, the state's requirement is redundant.

I believe the bill will eliminate a program that is unnecessary, a program that does not add value and--because it exempts four institutions--is already inconsistent. In an era when all of us—the state and private universities alike—must review every program we have in order to make sure it adds value, this is a program, at best, that is a redundant luxury that Connecticut can no longer afford.

Thank you.